

Tradition & Technology



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TRADITION AND TECHNOLOGY

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In the Old City is a man who makes comb from bone. They are exquisite and each one is unique. In conversation the man tells how each comb has its accompanying adhkār (remembrance of Allah), which goes with its making. It seems he is the last of a long line as his son has gone off to technical school. He barely makes a living any more. His craft, with its art and the remembrance of Allah which goes into each individual piece, has been made redundant by machine products, which don't last as long, are all the same and do not possess the baraka which comes from his dhikr of Allah.

In English the basic meaning of tradition is the process of handing down or handing over, derived from the Latin "tradit" which is the past participle of "tradere": to hand over or to deliver. As such it refers to the action of transmitting or handing down from one to another, or from generation to generation statements, beliefs, rules, motifs, customs, techniques or the like, especially by word of mouth or by practice rather than by writing. Less specifically, it connotes a long-established and generally accepted custom or method of procedure having almost the force of law, and an immemorial usage.

In Arabic there are a number of roots which are understood to convey a similar meaning: N^aQ^aL^a (نقل), which has the primary meaning of conveyance, transferral and relocation; R^aW^aY^a (روى), which has the primary meaning of drinking, irrigating, transmitting and relating; Q^aL^aD^a (قلد), in its form of taqlid (تقليد), which conveys the meaning of copying, imitating, adoption of concepts or ideas. The root, however, which best renders what concerns us in this paper is H^aD^aTH^a (حدث), in its meaning: to tell, relate, report by word of mouth. This word is familiar to all Muslims in its form "ḥadīth" (حديث), where it refers specifically to sayings and actions of the Prophet (ﷺ) which were handed down from transmitter (rawiya) to transmitter until finally they were committed to writing.

In referring to technology, we are specifically referring here to the methods by which things are constructed and crafted in the contemporary world, rather than applying the classical meaning of technology as it relates to the arts. We mean the process of mechanical manufacture, construction and realization of things and processes in the industrialized world, and the spread of these forms to the previously unindustrialized regions.

Further, it is our point of view that this contemporary technology is inimical and fundamentally antithetical to the traditional mode on almost every level including the practical, religious, philosophical, metaphysical and spiritual. This antipathy is the expression of the fundamental conflict for dominance between

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man, created of mud, water and spirit, and machine, created of mineral, fire and mind.

We are aware that this point of view is not one favoured by the majority of peoples, either in the industrialized world or in those parts of the planet which are busily industrializing or planning to do so, which include a large part of the world in which Muslim peoples live. We are aware that there are those who will point out that such industrial technology has led to the lengthening of the life span, the eradication of many endemic diseases, the exploration of the planet and outer space, the global network of communications and transportation, the highly technical science of microbiology, which has given rise through genetic selection and manipulation to the production of greater supplies of foodstuffs, etc.

We remind those who raise these points that the same industrial technology that has produced the means to lengthen lives has produced bacterial substances capable of eradicating millions on either a short or long term basis, and, through the modern military/industrial complex, holds the entire planet hostage through atomic and chemical devices. The technology which has allowed us to explore the earth and outer space is in the hands of people primarily concerned with the exploitation of the planet, a process which has already led to the death of rivers, lakes, seas and increasingly the ocean, while at the same time vast tracts of hitherto inaccessible jungle are being rapidly destroyed. These two processes alone, the poisoning of the water supply and the destruction of vast areas of vegetation, when coupled with the increasing pollution of the atmosphere, portend unbelievable and indeed unacceptable risks to the very future of life as it has been known by humans for untold generations. Likewise, the developments of the global communication and transportation network make possible, again through the collusion of industrial technocrats with the military/political axis, the destruction, some say, of the very life of the planet itself in a matter of minutes or hours depending on the delivery system. The technology which has given rise, through genetic manipulation, to bumper crops worldwide, has also raised serious problems relating to monoculture sterility. Also the increasing use of pesticides, developed through similar technologies, now threatens, through resultant forms of cancers and respiratory/pulmonary diseases, to kill or seriously debilitate the very people the crops were intended to feed.

In this century alone the application of technology to military use has killed, maimed or destroyed the lives of more people than the combined total of all other known wars in the history of the human race.

Thus we can say that modern industrial technology, while on the one hand holding forth a promise of an improved life for individuals, nations and geocultural regions, also represents a constant threat to the continued existence of the same individuals, nations and geocultural regions.

When we seek the root cause of the mad addiction to technological processes, we find it precisely at that critical juncture when the traditional world of Christianity was sundered and began its long fall into darkness and death. The juncture, called by some the Renaissance, was, in reality, the rebirth of the pagan impulse and its almost final triumph in modern times over what forces of belief remain in the world. It was a time in which the efflorescence of decay appeared as

light; a time in which the shaitanic statement of ultimate hubris and pride, "I am better than he, you did create me from fire and him from clay," (Al-Qur'ān 7:12) broke through the restraints which had been placed upon it by the forces of belief and tradition and reasserted itself in the West until it became in the 19th Century the dominant voice, a voice which now in the 20th Century threatens to drown out and override the voice of belief and tradition worldwide.

This entire rupture was brought about by the incapacity of the obscurantist forces which had perverted, over 1400 years, the message of Seyyidina 'Isā (عليه السلام) and seized control of Christendom in the name of false-Jesus masquerading as true Christ. It was caused by their inability to provide a metaphysically and spiritually sound cosmology based on Truth (al-Haq), which would be capable of holding together and providing a form for those within its boundaries who sought objective truth through observation of natural phenomena in the form of a purely physical science. In essence, the lie which Christendom has become by departing from the true teachings of Seyyidina 'Isā (عليه السلام) caught up with its perpetrators and maintainers. The matrix of belief was exposed and fundamental inconsistencies became apparent. Movement along these "fault" lines led to the split between what vestiges remained of revealed or traditional knowledge and acquired knowledge, mainly of the phenomenal world. The pivot wobbled and the centre, with its flaws, could not hold. The genie was out of the bottle. Shaitan broke the bonds which held him in check. What fetters of restraint remained had been loosened, and with every passing year grew looser until we reach the present time, in which only the thinnest, most tenuous threads remain for the "West", and increasingly the entire world.

Due to the confines of the length allowed in this paper we have only given a very broad and general picture, and admittedly the essential truth imbedded in the Christian tradition, stemming as it did from Divine Revelation, though encumbered in time by distortion and riddled with corruption, brought about by building upon lies and half-truths, did provide occasional flashes of light either in the form of individuals or cultural monuments after 1492. But these flashes are best typified by the meaning of the words of Allah ta'ālā in the Qur'ān al-Furqān in Sūrah Baqara: "Their likeness is as the likeness of one who kindles a fire, and when it sheds its light around him, Allah removes their light and leaves them in the darkness where they cannot see, deaf, dumb and blind and they reach not. Or like a rainstorm from the sky, wherein is darkness, thunder and the flash of lightning. They thrust their fingers into their ears by reason of the thunderclaps, for fear of death. Allah encompasses the unbelievers. The lightning almost snatches away their sight. As often as it flashes for them they walk therein, and when it becomes dark they stand still."

In the 14th Century (8th C.H.) Mamluk townhouse near Madrasah Sultan Hassan in Cairo, the greatest traditional Muslim architect of the 20th Century is arguing with an aide to the President of the country. It seems that the President wishes a helicopter landing pad attached to the rest house he originally wanted designed in the traditional mode of upper Egypt. The architect had spent two often

frustrating years seeing to every detail, and the building is now under construction. The architect is endeavouring to explain that though he is honoured to have received the commission it is impossible, especially at this late date, to accommodate the landing pad. This was 8 years ago; the building has never been finished.

What then remains to stem this tide which threatens to drown the world? For make no mistake, it is upon us, and no longer is it limited to or confined within the boundaries of what was once Christendom. Indeed within those very boundaries we have seen the fall of what was Holy Russia to the force of utter godlessness and kufr as enshrined in the constitution of the Soviets, which declares outright that God does not exist. Europe and America are undermined everywhere by the false doctrine of the illuminati, masonic theists with their myth of the "Deus Absconditus" who has abandoned the Creation which must now rely upon the "enlightened" ones to redeem it through the pseudo-principles of "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité". The Church has surrendered the transcendence of Almighty God to the forces of liberation theology, for which the name of Jesus has been invoked in order to make a deal with the revolutionary forces of godlessness, as once earlier pseudo-Christians made a deal with the pagan Roman empire. And the remnants of Bani Israel, custodians of the revelation vouchsafed to Ibrāhīm, Mūsā and Dāwūd (عليهم السلام), have been traduced by the secular materialist doctrine of political Zionism. What remains is the unchanged revelation accorded to Muhammad (ﷺ) by Allah ta'ālā in Qur'ān and the sayings and deeds of Muhammad (ﷺ) embodied in ḥadīth, as well as the unbroken and still living oral and practical tradition of transmission which has come down to us, its inheritors, over the course of the past 1400 years.

It is this, the total of Qur'ān, Sunnah, and oral and practical traditions which alone can constitute the "Islamic Response to Modernization", and the Islamic response to all that is contained within the seemingly simple word "Modernization". That modernization is the cursed and bitter fruit of the forces of technology which we have referred to earlier. We know that Qur'ān itself is protected in its entirety by Allah ta'ālā, as He states: "And We have without a doubt sent down the message and We will assuredly guard it from corruption" (15:9) and: "Truly this is a glorious Qur'ān inscribed in a Preserved Tablet." (85:22).

We also know that the Sunnah as delineated in the various collections, such as Al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Ibn Mājah, Tirmidhī, etc., thanks to the rigorousness of the early muḥaddithūn and to the preservation of their work in many places through the Muslim world, especially as regards the fiqh of 'ibādāt (rituals of worship), is not likely to disappear from our ken. It is, however, the fiqh of the mu'āmalāt (right action) from which is derived the traditions which allow us access to the meaning and, more important, the application of Qur'ān and Sunnah. This is deeply threatened by the forces of modernization with their concomitant of the technology which fosters this modernization. This is because the 'ibādāt is in its essence unchanging, and the Prophet (ﷺ), in his observance of the injunctions of Allah ta'ālā, set the forms. The ṣalāt, performed today, the forms and times of fasting, the rites of Ḥajj, etc., are the same now as they were then.

However, in the mu'āmalāt we have to observe the actions of the Prophet (ﷺ), his family, his companions, in a merchant trader bedouin society, and understand how they apply in an age of jet airplanes, space travel and modern communications. The link between that world and this world, that is between the world where people moved by horse or camel, lived in tents or compact earthen houses, ate local produce, a world whose silence was unbroken by the din of the internal combustion engine and the whine of jet rotors... and our own, is joined by those blessed people known as the 'auliā' Allāh (friends of Allah) and the 'ulamā' (learned ones). They constantly, over the last 1400 years, have maintained the essence of the meaning of the actions of the Best of Creation (ﷺ) and the community which gathered around him through the changes which have accrued during that period. For almost 1300 or those 1400 years the changes mainly occurred due to changing cultural, climatic and historical movements. It is only really since Napoleon entered Egypt a little over 150 years ago that the tidal wave of industrial technology, spread by the forces of colonialism, has engulfed the Muslim world. The speed and dehumanization of that process have seriously threatened that tradition, smothering it with an alien culture.

The Muslim world, weak and insecure, began adopting the means and methods of its conquerors, until it is today almost impossible to tell a Muslim city from any other city. As the Muslims began to adopt these ways it began to cut itself off from the links that it had heretofore historically maintained. As these vestiges of outer form, in which were encoded the inner meaning, have been subverted, a certain quality has been buried under quantity.

- ... 1000 mushaf of Qur'ān, but where is the man who calligraphed them?
- ... mass-produced garments from China, but where is the tailor who sewed by hand and passed on the baraka?
- ... one can buy aluminium trays by the gross, but where is the man who used to sit and tap the patterns out?
- ... one can easily find rayon and plastic hijab, but where are the women who embroidered the coats that differentiated one village from another?
- ... one can find any kind of bag with zippers and compartments to carry one's things around in, but where are the men who used to sew and embroider them from scraps?
- ... there are tape recordings by the dozen made in studios, but in how many new masajid can you hear beautiful readers of Qur'ān?
- ... miles of carpet that goes wall-to-wall bought by the yard, but where are the makers of carpets and the patterns that they wove? Replaced by machines in Belgium...
- ... machines extrude cement in panels and people put up a building in a matter of months, but where are the builders who knew the mysteries of space?
- ... air-conditioned in a Peugeot 504 you can drive from Makkah to Madina in 6 hours, but where are the drivers of camels who knew the songs of the desert and had the knowledge of the stars and how to travel by them?
- ... there are tasabeh by the 100's of extruded plastic resins, but where are the

men who went looking for the right tree and when they found the amber beads it sheltered, said 'Subhan Allah!'

Where are these people? They are disappearing everywhere, retreating with the old farmers before the tractors, combines, mowers, reapers, pesticides, fertilizers of foreign substances, alien to the land but able to plow 1000 fedan in a matter of hours.

... there are doors made in some factory in Sweden, however many you want, but in the past each door was different, each had its story with it, its geometry, the odd piece of wood, made by a carpenter, your neighbor, to suit you and the anomalies of your particular doorway.

The very fabric of traditional life has been torn and is in tatters.

The forces of modernism and false progressivism and relativism and the arrogance that goes with the knowledge of the present time is threatening even the 'auliā' and 'ulamā' because nobody has time any more. They have been the very last link while all those other things are disappearing everywhere. Now even the 'ulamā' are being torn from their posts by the introduction of international law, which is not based upon the Law of God but the law of man's imaginings. And the last precious link, the friends of Allah, the 'auliā', is being threatened by the rational scientific modernist forces which would deny the Unseen, and in reality would deny the existence of Allah, His Books, Angels, Messengers, (peace be upon them all). These forces seek to bring about now in the Islamic world the same "reformation" which occurred in the 14th Century Christian world, which would destroy the very miracle of existence and replace it with rationalist mentation. They would limit that which is limitless, obscure that which is luminous, and dessicate the green veins of that living tradition and reduce it to dust and death and ashes in the names of being as good as or better than the conquerors. They who would now colonize themselves gratuitously in the name of progress would deny the Ruḥ (soul) and the possibility of communion with the Source of all being, Allah Subḥāna Hu wa ta'ālā.

I am working on the 7th floor of a flat in modern Cairo. From below comes a cadenced chant of, "Allāhu Akbar, Allāhu Akbar, Allāhu Akbar, Wa lillāh al Ḥamd (Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest, and to Him is the Praise), followed by a loud thump. Then it is repeated, followed by another thump and begun again. It is not 'Īd. Is it a religious procession, a revolution? I go to the window to look down at the street. 20 or 30 men are laying new lines and are humping thick cables into a newly cut trench to increase the capacity of the electrical mains.

Allah ta'ālā says in many places in the Qur'ān: "Oh you who believe and practise good works." This connection between belief and action is fundamental to Islam. There cannot be belief in the abstract without its manifestation in time and space, that is, in daily life. Certain principles, actions or virtues are clear regardless of time and place; actions such as ṣalāt (daily prayer), ḥajj (pilgrimage to the house of Allah), and virtues such as piety and honesty. These fundamental

aspects of Islam are well known to everyone, but let us see what technology does to their application in our world in the following examples:

In Sūrah Nūr, āyat 24, we find the following: "Say to the believing men they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them and Allah is well acquainted with what they do." Against this āyat take a simple daily event touching millions in both the non-Muslim and Muslim worlds, the evening television news read by a female newscaster. What is the "Islamic response to modernization" in this case? This is perhaps the most benign example possible, given what is carried on the majority of telecasts, not to mention what is available on VCR's which are everywhere in evidence.

Here is a more troubling āyat with deeper implications from Sūrah Baqarah, āyat 190: "Fight in the cause of Allah, those who fight with you, but do not transgress the limits. For Allah does not love the transgressors." Through ḥadīth and tafsīr we know that the "limits" referred to, which could not be transgressed, relate to the slaying of women, children, infirm or aged people, the destruction of orchards or crops, poisoning of wells, etc. It has now become a standard mode of battle to bomb the enemy with powerful high explosives from an altitude of many miles at a speed approaching that of sound. In such a case, where the target will undoubtedly often include women, children, aged and infirm people as well as orchards, crops and water supplies, what is the "Islamic response to modernization" owed to this modern warfare brought about by advanced industrial technology and an attitude towards its use not bound by any revealed knowledge?

A more subtle example may be found by examining numerous āyats containing the verb ra'ā, to see, to behold, to regard, to dream, to think, to consider. Ayats that urge the believing reader to: "Consider the seed which you spill" (56:58), "Consider the soil which you till" (56:63), "Consider the water you drink" (56:68), "Consider the fire you kindle" (56:71), or, "Have you not seen how Allah has subjected all the earth for you" (22:65), or, "Have you not seen how Allah drives the clouds, then composes them" (24:43), or, "Have you not seen how Allah makes the night enter into the day" (31:29)?

All of these āyats and many more similar to them have been cited as the rationale for humans to investigate the universe and the phenomena contained within it, and form the basis for what Imam al-Ghazzali terms the '*Ulūm Ghayr Shar'iyyah*' (non-sharī'ah sciences), especially those which are mubāḥ (permissible), which is to say those sciences compatible with Islamic ideology, having an intrinsic worth in terms of public interest and social or functional utility to the community of believers. These include the various natural sciences, agriculture, medicine, mathematics, and so forth. All of these are permissible and indeed encouraged as part of the seeking knowledge which is farḍ'ayn upon the community of Muslims. Such studies brought about the great upsurge of knowledge on the part of the Muslim people, which was shared, in the earlier centuries of Islam, with other parts of the world, notably the West.

For the sake of example take now the case which so often occurs today, in which a young Muslim student, wishing to pursue a course of studies which is permissible and perhaps essential for his region, goes to the West to acquire this knowledge, due to the present unavailability of the physical plant or resources necessary for this research in his area. Take a subject such as soil mechanics or

hydrology or desert agriculture. Just as we can speak of the *tawhīd* of Islam, its essential oneness and cohesion, equally we can speak of the subtle gestalt of the industrialized technological society, be it communist, socialist or democratic. In a sense it is only a question of degrees of subversion of Islamic values whether the student attends classes in Moscow, Oxford or Boston. The rationale is that the student will extract the "good" or the "useful" and (hopefully) return to his region to better his people. This optimistic prognosis is made without understanding that the strand of "good", innocuous as it may seem, is attached to an interconnected organic whole of which no single part can be considered in isolation from the rest. Most often, if the student does return, it is as one more carrier of the germ which is now attacking the very roots of the Islamic and Muslim world. What then is the "Islamic response to modernization?"

Take another easily apprehended example: the modern city as clone of New York, Houston, Phoenix, L.A., Tokyo, Singapore, Novosibirsk, Rotterdam, as transplanted to Cairo, Jeddah, Abu Dhabi, Baghdad, Tehran, Karachi, without thought (for the most part) and eagerly (almost always). Wide blacktop streets, crawling with inefficient mechanical beetles from Asia, Europe or the USA, baking under subtropical sun. Anonymous glass curtain-walled buildings, air conditioners toiling away day and night surrounded by and infiltrated with "machines for living" (to quote Le Courbousier). Human dwellings are either identical to the office buildings, or else exist in model towns laid out to facilitate the machines which built them, and are usually equally inappropriate to the environment. Take one of the offices or apartment buildings stretching 10-20 stories into the air, where all floors above the second are served by elevators. Then remember the Qur'ānic injunction for women and men to "Guard their modesty" and the ḥadīth which states that if a man and a woman are alone in the same space *Shaiṭān* is the third party. Then reflect on the question of how benign and "simply" utilitarian elevators actually are.

In the fifth example, a Muslim inventor/businessman operating in accord with *sharī'ah* makes a breakthrough with a product which has applications in the area of electronics. He enters into a contract with a producer/manufacturer in the industrialized states, only to discover that his "profits" are inextricably tied up with the producer/manufacturer's business, which means that they are all subject to *ribā*, which exactly contravenes āyat 30 in Surah Rūm which states: That which you lay out in usury for the increase through the property of (other) people will have no increase with Allah", and āyats 275 and 276 of Sūrah Baqarah: "Those who devour from usury will not stand except as stands one whom *Shaiṭān* by his touch has driven to madness . . . Allah will deprive usury of all blessing."

The above examples are ones which occur daily to Muslims living in the present time and having no overt intention (*niyyah*) to enter into a way which transgresses either Qur'ān, Sunnah or tradition, but due to the pervasiveness of "modernization" and the technology which fosters it are drawn into such transgression with or without intent. Indeed most Muslims today are affected to varying degrees by these or similar instances. None of these situations touch directly upon their *'ibādāt*, but all of them reflect upon their *mu'āmalāt* and eventually may subvert the very fundamentals of belief and faith . . . for which we have so many examples in the children of Muslim immigrants to the West who have left their *dīn* (religion) in all but name and a few obligatory prayers lumped together and made up morning and evening, if that.

The contractor for a major shopping mall in Saudi Arabia is standing

with a friend, watching the movement of traffic of the crowds in the mall. The contractor points to the escalator rising freely in the middle of the mall, and his friend, a Westerner, at first notices nothing. Then he sees that the legs of the otherwise covered and veiled woman are all to be seen from the unnatural angle of the passersby below. The contractor remarks sadly, "I have contributed to the ruin of their culture."

At this point let us return to where we began, which is tradition, and examine it more closely. The definition provided at the beginning of this paper constitutes the generally accepted meaning of tradition in both English and Arabic. What is defined, however, only relates to the action and method of transmission from generation to generation, and states that certain "statements, beliefs, rules, customs and motifs" are being transmitted. As to source and content, the definition is silent.

It is precisely the source and the content, as well as the method, which we are concerned with, both in terms of its inner value and the outer form. For it is the inner value which is encoded in the outer form which preserves tradition from degenerating into being "merely" the unconscious or automatic transmission of various statements, beliefs, rules, customs and motifs which can just as easily become superstition, prejudice or blind dogma.

The source of true traditional knowledge is Allah ta'ālā and, for our time, His final Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), and the content is both the knowledge ('ilm) and the certainty (yaqīn) of the true position of the human being in the universal hierarchy as well as the purpose of existence and the way this purpose is fulfilled. Furthermore it is this knowledge and certainty ('ilm al-yaqīn) which separates those who are human in potential and those who are human in actuality, and through this 'ilm al-yaqīn are both prepared and able to carry out their purpose as both the slaves of Allah and His representatives on earth.

It is only when this knowledge is both inwardly integrated and outwardly articulated that the human being can begin to see through the illusion generated by the constant agitation which surrounds the whole complex of modern technology, be it mechanical, electronic, atomic or biological.

Allah ta'ālā says in Sūrah At-Tīn āyats 4-6: "Surely We created the human in the best of forms, then We reduced him to the lowest of the low, except those who believe and do good works, and theirs is a reward unfailing." Early in the Qur'ān in Sūrah Baqarah, āyats 30-39, Allah ta'ālā recounts the story of the creation of Adam (عليه السلام), mentioning, among other things, that He "Taught Adam the nature (names) of all things", and that even after Adam's and his wife's fall from their state of felicity in the garden, and subsequent taubah (repentance or return), Allah provided Adam with further "words" (kalimah) and "guidance" (hudā).

Thus the idea that humanity somehow through "progress" and "evolution" became ever more aware of truth and the nature of things is disproved and what, through further reading of Qur'ān, emerges as the true picture is that humanity from its beginning was in the state of complete knowledge. This degenerated, only to be renewed time and time again by those chosen by Allah, His Messengers and Prophets, (peace be upon them all, named and unnamed), to renew or restate primordial truth. Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) sealed this process some 1400 years ago by restating the revealed message of Truth (Qur'ān) and by demonstrating it through his actions in the world (Sunnah).

man to rebind them and to please incise them utilizing the same pattern. The man tells him the price for the 10 will be 300 pounds and they will take 6 months to complete. The friend demurs, saying: "You only charged me 10 pounds for one and it was ready in less than two weeks. Now you want to charge 3 times the price and it will take twice as long. Why?" The craftsman says, "My dear, to produce the same thing ten times over is very tiring and will unduly constrain my sensibilities. Accordingly you should pay me more and give me the time so that at least I can come to the work in between my other work so that I can have some freshness in the task."

In the face of the catastrophe which threatens our world today, it is difficult really to visualize a response, for in a sense, the response to these forces is in reality a reaction. What is needed is not reaction but action. We see in so many places in the Muslim world that, by a kind of reverse osmosis, the forces of Islam or the Muslim people have taken on the coloration and methods and technology from foreign lands, with the idea that somehow by doing so they can beat the devil at his own game, that somehow science in the hands of the Muslim will save the world, whereas in reality that science is a manifestation of the sickness. Surely a Muslim driving a car is putting as much pollution in the air as an unbeliever driving a car. The action of a Muslim pulling the trigger of a machine gun is just as aberrant as the action of a non-believer pulling it. Depletion of water resources by Muslim hydrologists is surely the same depletion as by non-Muslim hydrologists. Reaction to methods by the use of the same methods is not a solution to the problem.

There is an unfortunate group in the Muslim world today who do realize that there is no solution to the problem by the problem. They have great sincerity and understand the enormity of the problem, so much so that they have become intoxicated, drunk with the problem, and there has arisen in them fanaticism and hatred having nothing to do with Islam.

In the end it is neither false utopian dreams nor the forces of fanaticism and hatred that will stem the tide, for in truth the tide can only be stemmed by taking heart and attempting to act upon the words of our Prophet (ﷺ) who said that when you see the end of the world coming, plant a tree. Because salvation, in the Latin sense of "to make things whole" never comes by reaction but only by action. It is only by returning to the correct actions through inner realization of the truth of the Word of Allah and the sayings and doings of His Prophet (ﷺ) that this wholeness can come, whether for an individual or for the Ummah. Allah ta'ālā says: "Verily Allah will never change the condition of a people until they change themselves." (13:11). What is needed is for the Muslims to change themselves.

In the company of a bank president, a general and some of his staff, the chief of police, the former governor of a province and some other friends, we board a plane and fly for almost two hours to be met at the airport by a number of Peugeot 505's and their bedouin drivers and then drive 176 kilometers across the desert. There in a small oasis

village we spend the weekend visiting a friend who died to this world almost 800 years ago. In the evening, after ṣalat al-‘ishā’, we sit on high benches in the inner courtyard of a large mud house and discuss under the stars and sheltering trees the meaning of life and the purpose of existence. The house has been kept by the same family for more than 600 years now, during which time it has served the same purpose. There is no electricity, no television, no phone. Sakina is everywhere. On our return to the city the chief of police remarks, “Wallahi (by God), if that place did not exist and we could not visit regularly I would be dead; in a mental institution or in one of my own jails.”

إن الله لا يغير ما بقوم حتى يغيروا ما بأنفسهم

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